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Spies Costly, Often Wrong, But Nations Keep Using Them

Diplomats Believe Espionage Is Inadequate Substitute for Statesmanship

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WITH A SPATE OF ESPIONAGE CASES enlivening the news, this may be a good time to present a primer on spies, state secrets and official scandals.

There is not anything humorous about espionage. Spies occasionally get caught under circumstances that make it necessary to hang them. Faulty espionage can be a national disaster.

In diplomatic circles, however, there is a tendency to joke about call girls with secret atomic data pinned to their garters. This is like window-washers joking about broken ropes.

Diplomacy and espionage have a long history of association, not always happy, going back at least to Rome and Carthage. In the year 205 B.C. members of a Carthage diplomatic mission to Rome were denounced as spies, deprived of diplomatic immunity and taken to the coast under armed guard.

Rome has pretty well set the pattern. Twice, Russian members of the United Nations Secretariat have been arrested by the Federal Bureau of Investigation as spies and have been deported. Whether the current case, of Ivan Egorov and his wife, will end the same way is not certain.

WHAT SEEMS certain is that espionage and sex will continue for some time. The authority for that is Allen Dulles, former head of the Central Intelligence Agency, who said on a recent television program that the CIA recognizes the existence of sex.

Several American diplomats here found themselves unable to restrain some rude remarks on Dulles's observation.

Diplomatic opinion is that no one really knows who is a spy; that espionage often comes up with the wrong answers and is a romantic—but inadequate—substitute for diplomacy, statesmanship and intelligence.

No one knows what the CIA spends each year, but it may be as much as a billion dollars. Some American diplomats think an even greater mystery is why this money is spent at all.

Some Russian diplomats feel the same way about the Soviet secret service. The most tolerant perhaps are the British diplomats, who take pride in the traditions of their M-5, despite recent unfavorable publicity.

THE BRITISH are shocked by the style of American espionage. In London no one is supposed to know the name of the chief spy or where his office is.

Airlines pilots on the Washington-New York run, on the other hand, frequently point out the CIA building to passengers.

The Russian style of espionage seems to be influenced by the dour novels of Dostoevski, with much slinking about and writing cryptic messages with lemon juice.

Then there are the girls. Some of the more lurid New York newspapers have been trying to build a story that the lounge at the United Nations is a place where call girls meet foreign diplomats. The implication that neither is up to much good may be justified. As far as the UN security forces and the United States mission can discover, however, little if any espionage is involved.

The problem is that it takes some intelligence to be a good spy, and neither the British nor the American versions of Christine Keeler seem to be sharp on nuclear physics. A further problem, as far as the United Nations is concerned, is that there are no real state secrets available.

This does not prevent a Russian, or a diplomat of any nationality, from moonlighting as a spy, apart from his job with the UN.

MILITARY ATTACHES have been called officially licensed spies; it would be slack of them to avoid noting what they could about military preparations in countries to which they are accredited. Reams of copy filed by foreign newspaper correspondents are culled for intelligence information by the secret services of their countries.

Even professional diplomats are, by the nature of things, a species of spy. Their reports to their foreign offices cover everything of significance that they can discover.

Unlike professional spies, they depend chiefly on open sources of information—newspapers, documents and official and unofficial conversations. They make a valiant effort to evaluate the data they collect.

What spies, Russian and American, are attempting to find out, chiefly, is what the intentions of the other side really are. Our spies, for instance, would like to know what Premier Nikita S. Khruschev would do if something drastic happened to Cuba's Premier Fidel Castro. Their spies would like to know what President John F. Kennedy would do if the squeeze were put on West Berlin.

As professional diplomats see it, the trouble with such spying is that decisions on critical issues are seldom made in advance. A position paper filched from the files could be most misleading.

AMERICAN diplomats say the Russians misjudged American intentions when the Soviet Union authorized the attack on South Korea in 1950. They do not doubt that some bright young Soviet spy sent Moscow positive information that the Americans would not resist.

Likewise, American spies gave Washington positive information that the Russians were deeply involved in a large-scale operation in Cuba in 1961. A few [illegible] carrying rusty weapons and led by peasants, proved to be the substance of the alleged massive Russian takeover.

Then, of course, there was the Bay of Pigs—when the spies said the refugee army invading Cuba would be greeted by thousands of friendly anti-Castro Cubans.

So why do spies stay in business? The answer, so the diplomats say, is that any statesman who disbanded his spy apparatus would be tarred out of office as a traitor.

Then, they admit, there is always the off-chance that the next time the spies will be right.